

Rethinking Friendship

**Staff Gathering
Fall 2019**

The Challenge of Friendship in our Culture

*** 2008 BarnaGroup Poll**

1) 74% of American adults stated that having “close personal friendships” is one of their chief goals in life

2) But 40% of American adults stated that they are still trying to develop “a few good friends”

New Cigna Health Study Reveals Loneliness at Epidemic Levels in America

BLOOMFIELD, Conn. – May 1, 2018

- **Nearly half** of Americans report sometimes or always feeling alone (46 %) or left out (47%).

- **One in four** Americans (27 %) rarely or never feel as though there are people who really understand them.
- **Two in five** Americans sometimes or always feel that their relationships are not meaningful (43 %) and that they are isolated from others (43 %).

- **One in five** people report they rarely or never feel close to people (20 %) or feel like there are people they can talk to (18 %).
- **Only half of Americans** (53 %) have meaningful in-person social interactions on a daily basis.

→ The younger the generational cohort, the lonelier they say they are

- Babyboomers

- Gen X

- Millennials

- Gen Z (ages 18-24)

* “Those who report the highest levels of loneliness are young, single, male, and likely earning a lower income.”

– BarnaGroup (2018)



Mormonger
@Mormonger



Nobody talks about Jesus' miracle
of having 12 close friends in his 30s

featured on iFunny.com

Jesus' Solution to the World's Loneliness Problems!

→ His body, the Church!

→ Oh wait That's us.

Relational Patterns of our Culture Designed to Destroy Deep, Intimate, Kingdom Friendships

**I. Individualism – an individual-centered
view of humanity**

*** Emphasizes the value and dignity of
individual humans**

*** But: It reduces community & friendships to things that merely serve the needs and wishes of individuals**

*** In Jesus' vision of Covenant Community: Individuals serve the community; and the community loves, blesses, and gives meaning, purpose, and identity to its individuals**

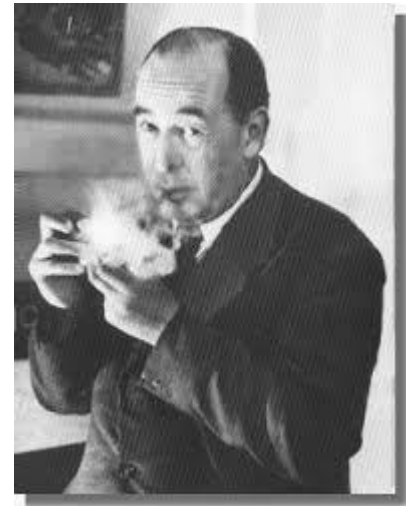
II. Modern Technology & Self-Sufficiency

*** Has brought us increases in everything from life-expectancy rates and financial stability, to leisure-time and individual choices in life**

*** But: We no longer NEED each other to survive physically. Relationships – including friendships – have become a luxury, not a necessity. We've lost the felt need for a commitment to any particular person or community.**

*** “Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art It has no survival value. Rather it is one of those things that give value to survival.”**

– C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*



III. Our Cultural Idolatry of Romantic Relationships

*** Romantic partners and spouses must also be our “best friends” – which means we don’t really need anyone else**

→ “A Bridesmaid’s Lament”

by Carrie English (*Boston Globe*, 2011)

I DIDN'T MARRY MY BEST FRIEND

COUPLES NEED MORE THAN JUST EACH OTHER

by Kate Shellnutt – *CT* (September 2014)

“Marrying your best friend is enough of a cultural expectation that if I admit I didn’t, people might pity me. But here’s the secret: I’m actually the lucky one. I have a husband who isn’t my best friend. And I have a best friend whom I’m not married to. They play different roles in my life, and I need them both.”

IV. We have lost clear “social scripts” that provide us a vision for – and guidance in – our friendships

*** Every society contains social “scripts” that its members “perform”**

- Social scripts provide meaning & values, & they guide our attitudes and activities in all our relationships

*** Marriage scripts are among the most important to a society's "powers that be" (law & government)**

*** Up until the 20th century, Western culture also offered clear & valued social scripts about friendship**

*** Over the last 100 years, clear, meaningful our social scripts about friendship have been largely lost**

*** “Friendship is so weird. You just pick a human you’ve met, and you’re like ‘Yup, I like this one,’ and you just do stuff with them.”**

– a comment on Facebook

*** Three examples of our lack of clear & helpful social scripts about friendships:**

1. Friendships: Quantity vs. Quality

*** When it comes to friends, our culture tends to think “the more the better”**

- Average # of Facebook “friends”

- 2012 = 262

- 2019 = 336

*** Most other cultures have taken a very different perspective**

- Proverbs 18:24 – “A person of many friends comes to ruin, but there is a friend that sticks closer than a brother”

- “A friend to all is a friend to none.”

– Aristotle

- “The bonds which nature has established to link one member of the human race with another are innumerable. But friendship not only surpasses them all, but is something so choice and selective that its manifestations are normally restricted to two persons and two persons only – or, at most, a very few.”

– Cicero

*** “Be courteous to all, but intimate with few. And let those few be well-trying before you give them your confidence.”**

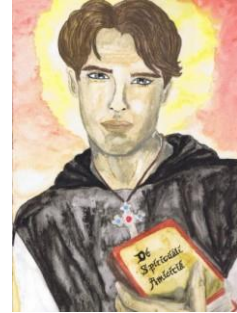
– George Washington

“We may be overly obsessed with picking the right spouse. But we are perhaps insufficiently obsessed with picking the right friends. Certainly that’s what St. Aelred or Aristotle would think if they could see the haphazard, amoral ways we tend to slide in and out of friendships.”

– Eve Tushnet



Aelred of Rievaulx on choosing a friend



“Not everyone we love should become our friend, for not everyone is [mature enough] for this. A friend is suppose to be a companion of your soul, someone to whom you join and attach your spirit.

A friend is someone you are so strongly connected to that that you wish to become one instead of two. This is because a true friend is someone you entrust yourself to as another self, from whom you hide nothing, from whom you fear nothing.

Thus, the most important consideration when choosing a friend is to be certain that they have the appropriate level of maturity and character for all of this.”

– from: *Spiritual Friendship*

*** Complicating Factors in Our Culture**

- (1) Our overwhelming access to so many people (technology)**
- (2) Our generally low expectations of what a “friend” should be and do**
- (3) Different understandings between friends of how deep their friendship is**
- (4) Differences between how introverts & extroverts do friendship**
- (5) Cultural differences**

2. Friendships: Context-based or Intention-based?

a. Context-based Friendship – the basis of the friendship is a circumstantial social context

*** “Friendship by accident”**

*** Where American adults meet their closest friends**

- At their workplace (42%)**
- Through other friends (35%)**
- In their neighborhood (29%)**
- During K – 12 schoolyears (28%)**
- In College (20%)**
- At their Church (20%)**
- Online (7%)**

– BarnaGroup (2017)

*** Most friendships will begin – and end –
as context-based relationships**

b. Commitment-based Friendship – the basis of the friendship is intentionality and mutual commitment

*** “Friendship by intention”**

*** Intentional commitment requires clear, on-going discussion about the nature of the friendship**

- This helps prevent mismatched expectations, feelings of rejection or guilt, etc.

*** A Basic Fact of Relationships:**

Intentional, formalized relationships are more meaningful and last longer than easy-going, informal relationships

- Remember: When it comes to relationships, including friendships:
 - “Easy In = Easy Out”**
 - “Difficult In = Difficult Out”****
- Jesus got this!**

Luke 14:25-28 – “Now large crowds were travelling with Jesus.

He turned to them and said: Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple Count the cost None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.”

*** If we want our closest friendships to become more deep, meaningful, and lasting, we will have to explore ways to make them more intentional, formal, and committed.**

3. The widespread loss of deep, intimate same-sex friendships in the 20th century (especially for males)

a. New 20th century cultural vision of a “real man” as independent, self-reliant, and non-emotional









– Male Heroes & Icons in our Culture



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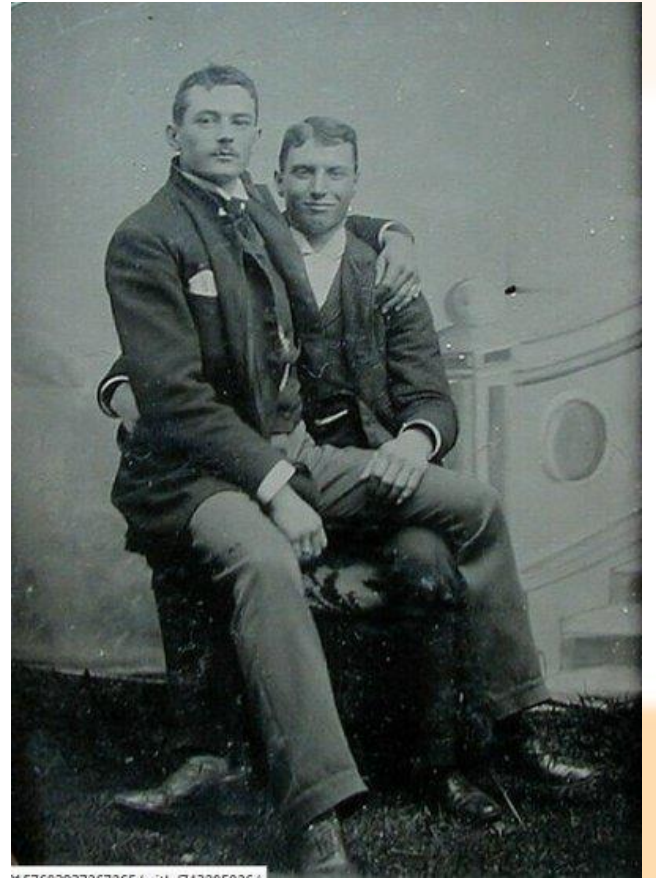


**Clint
Eastwood**

**Dirty
Harry**







b. Hyper-sexualization of culture and close relationships

- * Sigmund Freud – sex is the primary psychological force that motivates people**

- * Modern Advertising and Marketing – using sex to sell products ends up eroticizing the entire culture**

c. The invention of “homosexuality” as a personal identity category (in 1869)

*** This led to the creation of the identity category of “heterosexuality”**

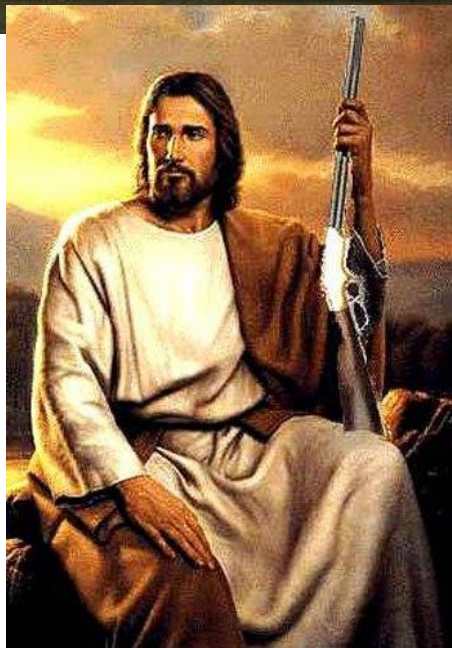
*** Which led to “homophobia” and heterosexual male fears and suspicion about showing deep, intimate emotional or physical connection to another man**

d. The Rise of “Muscular Christianity”

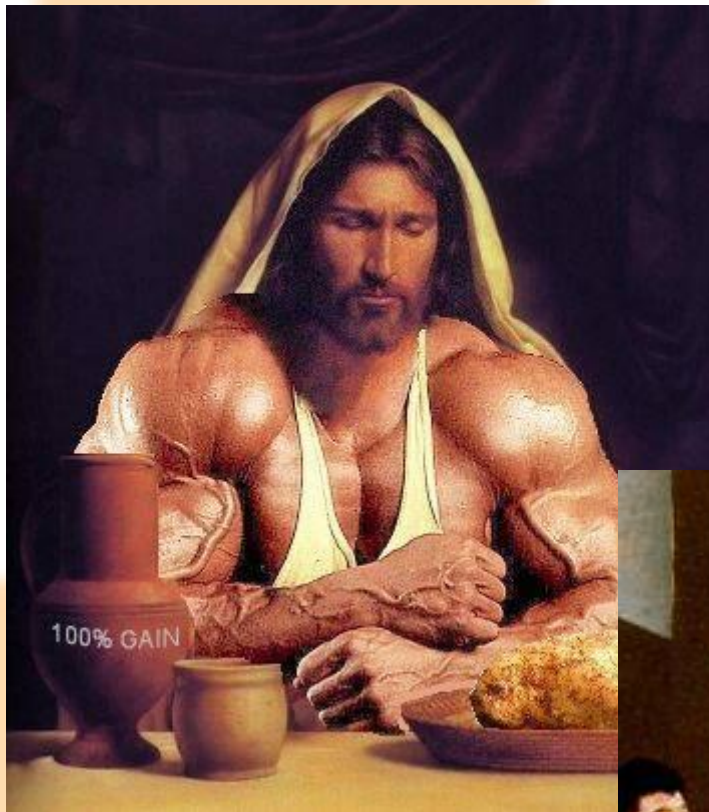
- * The hyper-masculinizing of “real” Christian men**

- * The hyper-masculinizing of Jesus**

The Warrior Jesus



Rethinking the Last Supper?



The “Hulk” Theory of the Atonement?



*** “In Revelation, Jesus is a pride fighter with a tattoo down His leg, a sword in His hand and the commitment to make someone bleed. That is a guy I can worship. I cannot worship the hippie, diaper, halo Christ because I cannot worship a guy I can beat up.”**

– Mark Driscoll



Discussion Question:

What practical challenges do you see us having to deal with if we try to lead and assist our congregation in forming strong, committed Kingdom friendships?

